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USTR FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE;  
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CP BUTLER OKINAWA FOR AREA FIELD OFFICE;  
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION AFHGANISTAN - TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Most Wednesday morning papers front-paged the massive demonstrations held Tuesday across France to protest the French government's introduction of a new employment law for first-time job seekers.

¶1. "Afghanistan: Terrorism Slowing the Pace of Reconstruction" The liberal Asahi's Kabul correspondent Kitagawa wrote (3/29): "It has been more than four years since the fall of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime. Although the nation has taken its first steps toward democracy with the convening of the National Assembly for the first time in 32 years, life in Afghanistan remains hard. As seen by the frequent occurrence of suicide bombings, public security is lacking, reflecting the shadow of the warlords. The central government is continuing to look for assistance from the international community in the hope of eradicating armed groups and improving Afghanistan's lagging living standards.... Afghanistan is a multiethnic country where ethnically organized armed factions fought a civil war. Among the members of the National Assembly, there are many leaders and commanders of armed factions, and they are not accustomed to arriving at solutions through discussion, one of the ground rules of democracy. A local journalist stated, 'There are concerns that the National Assembly could once again become a venue for ethnic confrontation.' Although the disarmament of these military groups ended in July 2005, more than 1,000 armed organizations are said to still exist....

¶2. "The eradication of illicit drugs, believed to be a source of funds for the armed groups, is an important issue.... According to a report issued by the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in September 2005, annual production of opium in Afghanistan was 4,100 tons, a

decrease of 100 tons from the previous year but still accounting for 87 percent of global production. President Karzai has said that it will take at least 10 years to eradicate production. Donor nations met February in London and adopted an agreement that includes reconstruction targets for the next five years. The agreement also allows the US military and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to operate in Afghanistan through 2010, while calling for the complete dismantlement of all illegal armed groups by 2007 and the enactment of a law to curb bureaucratic corruption. The Afghan government has said that it needs 4 billion USD yearly to reach these targets. The more than 60 countries and international organizations attending the meeting pledged 10.5 billion USD over five years.... A diplomatic source in Kabul stated, 'There is always a danger that Afghanistan's reconstruction could be set back if the international community loses interest. US and ISAF troops may be needed beyond 2010. There is a long way to go until this country is stabilized.'

SCHIEFFER